

April 26, 2020 – We Lament

With Deb Hopper

If you have two candles, please get them ready to light. Following the lighting of the Christ Candle, we will light a second candle for the victims and their families of the Nova Scotia shooting. Faith United has often lit a second candle for national and world tragedies.

OPENING PRAYER:

Lord, as we start this day, help us remember that we belong to you. Our desire is to act according to your plan for our lives. Be with all of us as we grieve those in society who are suffering, especially in Nova Scotia. Fill us with gratitude knowing that you died for us – rising again on your own new morning – so that every day could be filled with the wonder of your love, the freedom of your Spirit, and the joy of knowing you.

AMEN

LIGHTING THE CHRIST CANDLE

Light your Christ candle and say the following:

We light this candle now, on this the third Sunday of Easter, acknowledging our deep desire to feel the joy of communing with God and of being in the presence of the risen Christ. May we dance, sing and laugh celebrating the Spirit.

Light the second candle and say the following:

Lord, we light this candle to remember the victims of the Nova Scotia tragedy. We pray for all affected, those who lost their lives and those who are forever changed by grief and loss. We pray for consolation, for comfort and for strength. Hold us together as one people, Lord, and keep our hearts focused on the love and peace you offer us all.

We ask this in Jesus' name. AMEN

SCRIPTURE READING : Lamentations 3:19-33 (NIV)

I remember my affliction and my wandering, the bitterness and the gall.
I well remember them, and my soul is downcast within me.

Yet I still dare to hope when I remember this.

Because of the Lord's great love, we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail.
They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.

I say to myself, "The Lord is my portion; therefore, I will wait for him."

The Lord is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him;
It is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord.
It is good for a man to bear the yoke while he is young.

Let him sit alone in silence, for the Lord has laid it on him.
Let him bury his face in the dust — there may yet be hope.
Let him offer his cheek to one who would strike him, and let him be filled with humility.

For no one is cast off by the Lord forever.
Though he brings grief, he will show compassion, so great is his unfailing love.
For he does not willingly bring affliction or grief to anyone.

Lament (verb): To mourn

Lamentation (noun): an expression of great sorrow, loss and distress

MESSAGE: WE LAMENT

This message has been prepared by Deb Hopper for the Faith United Milton congregation on April 26, 2020, and shared with Palermo United. Any comments you might like to pass along after reading it can be sent to uccandeb@gmail.com ©2020 Deb Hopper. Provided here with permission.

Dear friends;

I offer to you the first few words of Lamentations: “How deserted lies the city, once so full of people! How like a widow is she...”

Empty city streets, shuttered malls, unused highways... Our pews, meant to gather people, gather dust.

Our schools sit vacant. Our playgrounds are wrapped with yellow hazard tape. The sounds of playing children replaced by the empty jingle of lonely swings swaying sadly in the wind. Neighbours wave from the safety of their front windows, party invitations are left unopened, coffee meet-ups have stopped. Our communities are broken.

And when I venture out, the world has a different feel. My footsteps, before unheard, echo in a new way. There are line-ups at the grocery store, the voices of those waiting subdued. The world smells odd, no perfume in the store aisles, no hot dog vendor at the Canadian Tire. Caution rules the day, fear dictates order.

We lament.

Lamenting is not the same as whining or complaining. Lament is a unique, Christian act of worship.

The book of Lamentations is a beautiful, epic poem written in deliberate meter and measure. The poet shares intimate horror, hope and witness during the fall of Jerusalem and the resulting Babylonian exile. In chapter 3, verses 19-33, we learn the true spiritual power of lament. Lament is practical advice on how to get through adversity.

The writer shares: “Yet I still dare to hope when I remember this.” Braving hope in the face of unrelenting despair is a special kind of fortitude. And how do we become so brave? When we remember that God loves us. That we are loved by a God who has unlimited compassion for His children.

The Hebrew word in the passage translated to “love” is “*he-sed*”, which can mean kindness, loving kindness, mercy, goodness, faithfulness, or love. Like the Greek word, *agape*, in the New Testament, *he-sed* is a word that involves action — kindness or love as expressed through kind or loving actions. It is not passive; it is alive.

We can have faith in God’s never-ceasing, never-ending *he-sed*. Every morning they are made new, so they remain ever fresh. Since this is true, we have nothing to fear. Although the present circumstances are terrible, our future is assured.

It is because we know this to be true, that we can survive anything. This passage reads like the current medical advice; shelter in place, isolate yourself, refrain from unnecessary outings. Put into current language the advice is as follows: to wait quietly, alone, in silence; to face the problem squarely and to put effort into dealing with the loss; to face the problem with humility and to literally “take it on the chin”.

None of this is easy. We miss our friends and family. We are afraid of catching the virus, we are even more afraid of those we love catching the virus. Our lives have been upended. Many people have lost their jobs, some permanently. Our economy is in a tail spin.

Ah there I go, lamenting again.

The truth is that hope comes from intentionally putting your mind on God. Lament mourns, and at the same time, fixes that grief to the character of God and the promise to his people. The poet’s voice is sure: lamentations is a forceful acknowledgment that suffering is a part of life as is, in equal measure, God’s compassion.

We are reminded that we are called to, in all things, remember God’s love. That in focussing on Him and his word, we will overcome our lament; our mindset will shift from bitter loss to hope and optimism.

As we are assured in the bible, nothing is forever. In God’s time all things are have a season, with a beginning and an end. And so... we wait. And we dare to hope. And we lament.

God bless and keep you safe until we meet again.
Deb

HYMN: In Christ Alone (link takes you to Youtube)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=887jcen5Pec&app=desktop>

CLOSING PRAYER:

Paraphrased from Rev. Heather Gilmour’s prayer of Easter Sunday, used with permission:

O God, at this time of fear and uncertainty, we do not always know how to pray as we ought; but we trust that your Spirit intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words. We turn to you with our heart hungers and our deep need for your comfort and your healing grace.

We would be your Easter people, Holy God. May our lives bear witness to your love and compassion, your comfort and peace to all those we meet along life's path. May we have faith enough, and courage enough to follow Jesus' way: to pour out our love to all who are locked in fear, to show compassion for all who suffer, and to do what we can to help our world overcome this epidemic. Let the life that is so powerful in the risen Christ be in us also, for the sake of the world you so love.

AMEN